

## ARTICULATING THE BUSINESS CASE FOR SAFETY EXCELLENCE



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Welcome to Safety Culture Excellence. Today's topic: Articulating the Business Case for Safety Excellence. My name is Shawn Galloway, and I'm proud to be your host.

Hello, everyone! This week I'm recording from Indiana, Pennsylvania, which is also known as the Christmas tree capital of the world, and also the birthplace and hometown of one of my favorite actors, Jimmy Stewart.

So, I'm gonna start something a little different here today. Over the next few weeks, you're gonna hear some conversations between Terry Mathis, the CEO and Founder of ProAct Safety, and myself that are based on certain questions that have been emailed to us by subscribers from all over the world. We have a whole list of them that we want to try to get through over the next coming weeks. So, I encourage you, if you have any specific questions, or if you like for us to elaborate on any of these topics, by all means, try to get them in now.

So, if there's anything you'd like for us to specifically address and add it in on the queue, please, by all means, shoot us an email at [podcast@proactsafety.com](mailto:podcast@proactsafety.com). That's P-O-D-C-A-S-T at P-R-O-A-C-T S-A-F-E-T-Y.com.

So, I recently sat down with Terry and we went over some of these questions. So, this week, let's go ahead and get started and we'll hear the conversation. Have a great week.

**Shawn Galloway:** Terry, we had a question recently from one of our subscribers, and the question was this: How do you convince somebody – if you're safety professional, how do you convince somebody at the highest levels of the organization, and sometimes even amongst the different levels in management – how do you convince them of the importance of doing more than just what's required? Essentially, how do you convince them that great safety equals great business?

**Terry Mathis:** Well, I'm hearing your question in two parts. One is, how do you convince anybody of anything? So, the convincing is one of the challenges here. But the other is articulating the business case for safety. And, you know one of the things that I find even in myself is that a lot of us who are professionals in safety haven't articulated it to ourselves. We can't tell ourselves why safety is important. We seem to inherently know it, but we really can't say it very well. And I think these are the two challenges. Let's start with the first one. How do you convince anybody of anything?

Well, in some of the things that we're reading recently, they've broken it down into two parts, and I thought this was an interesting way of thinking about it. The two parts of influencing someone or convincing someone of something are: 1) Can you do it? And I think this is a stumbling block for a lot of managers. I think a lot of managers have given effort to safety and not seen it produce the desired results, and so they have a problem with that. They have a problem of thinking, "I can't do safety very well. And if it's not doable, then certainly I'm not going to do it. Maybe I'll assign somebody else to do it, and maybe I'll do at it, but I'm not really going to do it."

So, the first thing you have to do to convince someone of something is to convince them that they can do it. The second part is to convince them that it's worth doing. This is where I think we, as safety



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professionals, can do a better job, also. Why would a company want to be excellent in safety? And, you know, I find as much resistance at the top level as I do at the bottom level. Companies that are terrible at safety tend to resign themselves and say, "Well, we just can't do it. We just can't get on top of this." But companies that are pretty good at safety, also you hit another barrier out there, where they say, "Well, we're good enough. We don't really have to be better."

**Shawn Galloway:** And better than the industry average, for example.

**Terry Mathis:** Exactly. And I hear this all the time, "So, why pick on us? Go pick on the lants that are bad at safety and leave us alone. We're pretty good. And since we're pretty good, let's turn our attention to other things where maybe we're not pretty good, where maybe we're not industry average, where we're not in the top ten percent in our company." And so they take a lot of the effort away from safety and focus it on quality, or on productivity, or on engineering issues or other issues that are there.

So, how do you convince someone who's bad at safety that they need to be good? Well, again, you've got to convince them that they can, and then you've got to convince them that it's worth doing. So, can they do it? There's a world of statistics out there to indicate that it can be done. And the bottom line is, very often when you're convincing someone, it's not the rhetoric, it's not the wording, it's the story. It's the story of the other person. It's seeing somebody else do it. And I think one of the greatest things you can do for a manager is to take them to a site where safety is excellent. Let them see it firsthand. Let them talk to the people.

First of all, I think they think one of two things – either, "This site is just radically different than mine. They had an advantage over me. That's why they outperformed me at safety over there." So, it's good for them, first of all, to realize that this site's not plated in gold. It's not full of 20 safety professionals and it's not just recently, perfectly engineered and perfect housekeeping. And, also, talk to the people and find out that they're just human beings like everyone else. They have just set this goal to make it happen, and they've been able to find the way to do it.

"So, can I do it? Well, here's somebody very similar to us who has done it." That's the most convincing thing that you can do is to show someone else similar who has done it. That makes it seem fabulously more doable. Now, is it worth doing? Well, you know, in some industries, this is an easier case to make than in others. For instance, in the petroleum industry right now, if you want to be a supplier to one of the major petroleum companies, they hold you to a standard of safety excellence. And if you don't perform to a certain level, it's not just that you are at a competitive disadvantage, you may not even get to bid.

They may not even want you to come to propose to do business with them if you're not performing at a certain level in safety. There's other industries that way, also. We had someone come to us and say, "Help us in safety." And when we ask, "Why do you need our help, and what's your rationale for trying to improve safety?" They told us about a major company they went to and said, "We want to have your account nationwide." And they said, "You're not good enough in safety. We'll allow you to be a provisional supplier, but if you don't drastically improve your safety program over the next year, we'll take that away, also. So, not only will we not give you our nationwide account, we won't even let you be a listed vendor."

**Shawn Galloway:** I've heard things like, "If you can't manage something as important as keeping your

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employees uninjured, what else can't you manage?"

**Terry Mathis:** And I think that's the thinking. When we talked to the major Petro Chems, that's what they tell us. They say, "First of all, we don't want to mix unsafe employees with our safe employees. That's compromising what we've been working on for the past 25 years." But the second thing is exactly what you mentioned, Shawn, and that is that they say, "Well, if you can't manage safety, what else can't you manage?" And they equate safety to a large degree with quality. They say that both safety and quality are errors in production. They are undesired and unwanted outcomes of a production system.

So, if you can't control the accidents, can you control the defects in your system? And they look at it as very much the same issue. So, safety – I think this is the challenge. Can you convince a manager that excellence in managing safety equals excellence in managing anything? I mean, fill in the blank. If you can manage safety, you can manage virtually anything because safety has all the elements of management in it. It has low probability outcomes. You have to dig back into your system and see what things are critical and vital to make them happen, to control the accidents. If you can find out what's critical and vital to producing accidents, can you find what's critical and vital to producing quality?

**Shawn Galloway:** Here's where I see some of the problems. Managing safety really has to do with managing people and working with people and understanding people. What's interesting is that the average professional, when they're brought up through their schooling, brought up through their experiences, are taught very effectively how to manage things, how to manage systems, but not really the people aspect of it. And I think, sometimes, that's where the breakdown is. Many times, you'll sit in on a safety meeting, and it seems to be uncomfortable for certain managers and certain supervisors to really give a good heartfelt message in safety.

Oh, boy, when they're talking about production, when they're talking about the quality of the product, they have that sense of ownership in it. But sometimes maybe we just haven't made it personal enough to where they see the value that "Good safety means good business."

**Terry Mathis:** I think there's an oversimplification there, also. I still see in talking to a lot of managers in a lot of business that they automatically tend to jump to the conclusion that if somebody got hurt, they made a mistake. They made an error. They did something. And I hear the word far, far too often: "They did something stupid that got themselves hurt." This underlies a very basic misunderstanding of how accidents happen, and I think this is where the safety professional needs to teach the manager the reality of low probability risks. Yes, there are stupid things you can do in the workplace and they'll get you hurt every time you do them.

Very, very seldom do we see those on accident reports. Very seldom do we see those. There's also thinking out there, I believe, that managers want to say, "Well, the worker did something stupid." And the worker wants to say, "Well, the managers won't put their money where their mouth is and fix the things that are safety issues." And I think a lot of sites that we've looked at have come to an impasse on that. Do we go out and fix things, or do we try to work with human behavior to improve what's going on? And I think a lot of people don't realize the reality of how both of those interact with each other, and how they're involved.

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And, because of that, they tend to get into the blame game. And so, rather than fixing the problem, they just fix the blame and they move on. And a lot of managers tend to think that fixing the blame is the end of the line. Once you've found out who's at fault, once you've found out what happened, "Well, there it is. And we've got to move on from here." To have them really go back and understand that even very good people can make very – can get hurt, can have undesired outcomes. You don't have to be stupid to get hurt. You can be incredibly intelligent and get hurt.

To wrap it all up, how do you convince a manager that safety is good business? Well, number 1: you've got to convince the manager that you can be better than you are insafety. If they see this as mission impossible, you're lost right up front. So, show your manager other sites, other people within your industry that are doing better in safety. And, if possible, humanize that experience. Don't make it vicarious, make it human.

Go to the other site. Visit the other site or call the other site. Get on a conference call with a couple of key people at another site and say, "Tell us what you're doing in safety. Tell us how you got to the level that you are in safety right now." And make this a human experience. The second part of convincing is: Is this worthwhile? And this is where I think you have to make the case that good safety management is good management, in general.

Learning how to control the vital things that make the difference, learning how to identify low probability risks and the cure for them, will not only improve you in safety, but it will improve you in quality and environmental and ergonomics and all kinds of other things that will make your business not just safety excellent, but overall excellent, managed and operated."

Until next time, remember: "In safety, prevention trumps reaction." For more information on Safety Culture Excellence, or if you have a topic to suggest, please email us at [podcast@proactsafety.com](mailto:podcast@proactsafety.com).